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ABSTRACT

Defining "community literacy" as literate acts that could yoke community action with intercultural education, strategic thinking and problem solving, and with observation-based research and theory building, this paper articulates this "generative and tension-filled" vision of community literacy. The paper begins by examining the social/historical context of urban settlement houses, a context from which the Community Literacy Center (CLC) emerges and yet seeks to reinvent in particular ways. The paper notes that the CLC is a community/university collaboration between the Community House (one of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's oldest settlement houses) and the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon. The second part of the paper examines the theoretical context of the CLC, examining how the concept of community literacy is positioned within other established theories of literacy as they relate to community building. The paper concludes with an examination of a set of guiding principles that have emerged after 5 years of reflecting on community literacy in practice on the Northside of Pittsburgh. Contains one figure and 49 references. (RS)

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COMMUNITY LITERACY

Wayne Campbell Peck
Community Literacy Center

Linda Flower
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Community Literacy Center

The young and the old on Pittsburgh's North Side know it inside and out. The Community House is a six-story, red brick building standing in a city park at the intersection of four very diverse inner-city neighborhoods. As one of Pittsburgh's oldest settlement houses, for almost eight decades the Community House's classrooms, kitchens, offices, gym, and swimming pool have been neighborly places where people of various cultural traditions have constructed and shared a common life. Amid the relentless and sometimes bewildering changes that take place in the lives of urban residents, the Community House is a place of connection where grassroots initiatives like the Community Literacy Center (CLC) are conceived and launched.

Mark is a teenage writer at the Community Literacy Center, or, as he would say, a "rap artist waiting to be discovered." Captivated by the rhythm and rhyme of rap, Mark imagines and sings of a world in which teenagers play powerful roles and have valuable messages to tell. On the street and front stoops, Mark interprets his world and practices his craft with people who listen and respond. He is a bright and resourceful teenager who, like all too many African American males, is frequently suspended from school. In his raps and in his life, Mark flirts with the possibility of joining a gang and becoming a member of a group that at least values his art form.

Mark is a fifteen-year-old at a crossroads. He has important choices to make. He wants to be heard and taken seriously and to have a place to come to work on his dreams. The Community Literacy Center is an alternative forum for Mark's art and argument and a place to begin a broader conversation about the issues he cares most

about. In a recent CLC project, for example, Mark and ten other teens used writing to investigate the reasons for the increase in student suspension in the public schools. To present this "policy paper" Mark and his peers organized a "community conversation" with the mayor, the media, the school board president, principals, and community residents, in which Mark performed a rap written from a teen's perspective and his peers interpreted it for the audience. As the culmination of their eight-week project, the teens also presented a newsletter, "Whassup with Suspension," which has since become required reading for teachers and students in Mark's high school.

In a question/answer segment of the community conversation, Mark remarked to reporters that his college-age writing mentor at the CLC had helped him "find ways to get [his] message across without insultin' people" to the very people he thought never cared. But Mark is not the only one attempting to talk across boundaries. Mentors sign up for Carnegie Mellon's Community Literacy seminar because they too are ready to move out of their own comfort zone of academic practice and campus realities. Under the name of mentor they come as learners to support teenagers like Mark in this hybrid, a community discourse in the making that they too struggle to enter. Like the students, the CLC staff inhabit various labels—community spokeswoman, project leader, African-American male role model, center director, researcher, college professor, graduate student—but the working role everyone shares, as literacy leader working with writers, takes everyone out of their "home" discourse.[1]

[1] The design and staffing of the CLC reflect its intercultural agenda, which invites people to cross boundaries of race, age, class and gender. Executive director Wayne Peck (Ph.D., M.Div.) brings 18 years experience in managing the Community House and a background in literacy theory. As director, Lorraine Higgins (Ph.D.) brings argument theory based on research in everyday contexts to the practical problems of structuring collaborative projects. Joyce Baskins brings 20 years of community activism to her advocacy for African-American youth. Donald Tucker brings experience as a jazz musician and construction foreman to engaging inner-city youth in designing community development videos. Elenore Long (ABD) brings her research on literacy and social action to coordinating the CLC's college student mentoring program. Kevin McCartan brings know-how in grassroots, community development and his construction experience to CLC projects. Linda Flower (Ph.D.) is president of the CLC board, and co-director, National Center for Study of Writing and Literacy (NCSWL) at Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon. She brings her research in cognitive rhetoric to CLC projects and to the task of supporting problem solving in a community/university partnership. Peck, Higgins, and Long are affiliate researchers at NCSWL.

When the CLC was launched five years ago as a community/university collaborative between the Community House and The National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon, it defined community literacy as action and reflection—as literate acts that could yoke community action with intercultural education, strategic thinking and problem solving, and with observation-based research and theory building. But for many, the CLC's most controversial claim was that it was writing—the collaborative work of creating public, transactional texts—that could make this new set of connections and conversations possible.

The Community Literacy Center has propelled the Community House beyond typical recreational, spiritual, and social programs for inner-city residents. Unlike other urban centers of its kind, the Community House has transformed its meeting rooms into sites of *educational practice*. It has become a place where teens like Mark or tenant representatives like LuWanda Baker create documents for change. As the Community Literacy Center becomes a grassroots laboratory for learning, the catalyst of that learning is writing. Its goal is a new kind of discourse for those who work and live in mixed urban neighborhoods, a discourse that speaks to and works through disparities and differences by inviting participation and distributing expertise. Based on the model of projects like Mark's, the CLC has brought a growing number of voices to the table. Drawn together by issues, teenagers, local politicians, community leaders, struggling parents, college staff and students have used the CLC as a way to take literate action on pressing community problems—teen pregnancy, landlord/tenant relations, teens and drugs, and the restructuring of Pittsburgh's schools in the 1990's. Nurses, school board members, parents from local housing projects, college students, and city teenagers share a growing pool of resources, experience, and expertise as they imagine new possibilities, forge connections with each other, and reflect on the cultural richness of the literate practices in their neighborhoods. Our belief in writing as a source of power for the renewal of urban communities motivates us and lies at the heart of our emerging notion of "community literacy."

This paper is our attempt to begin to articulate this generative and tension-filled vision of community literacy. We begin by examining the social/historical context of urban settlement houses, a context from which the CLC emerges and yet seeks to reinvent in particular ways. In part two of this paper, we examine the theoretical context of the CLC, examining how the concept of community literacy is positioned within other established theories of literacy as they relate to community building. And finally, as a point of departure for building a larger theory of literacy, we examine a set of guiding principles that have emerged after five years of reflecting on

community literacy in practice on the Northside of Pittsburgh. We affirm our commitment to developing a community literacy that works for social change and which arises from an intercultural conversation that creates bridges and allows for productive working relationships among people of difference.

PART I.

URBAN SETTLEMENT HOUSES AS LABORATORIES FOR CHANGE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE CLC

Community House was built in Pittsburgh in the early 1900's at the height of the settlement house movement in the United States. The settlement house movement was an early educational, social, and cultural force for equity in Britain and America in which women like Octavia Hill, in Britain, and Jane Addams, in America, played pivotal roles. Christina Arbuckle founded Community House in 1916 with a vision to create a "light house of education" for urban neighborhoods—a place of "friendship, recreation and uplift," a place to form "wholesome friendships in crowded industrial cities like Pittsburgh" (Arbuckle 6). In their early days, settlement houses like Community House operated as laboratories for social change. Their leadership was among the first to urge a more scientific approach toward dealing with urban issues involving low-income neighborhoods. Out of their perspective were to emerge studies of housing, labor, education, and recreation. Trolander goes further, identifying the settlement house as the birth place of urban studies which led to legislative action for urban residents.

Initially, the settlement house mission was to work for educational and social renewal; in practice, settlement houses furthered cultural interaction. Beginning in London with the settlement of Toynbee Hall in 1884, Canon Samuel A. Barnett claimed that England was establishing two parallel societies within its cities that fostered a division between rich and poor. Toynbee Hall was the first settlement house, a social experiment whose purpose was to "connect the centers of learning with the centers of industry" (qtd. in Kraus iii). As the first of its kind, a partnership between the community and Oxford University, the settlement house was a living arrangement that resulted in university teachers and students taking up residence or "settling" in urban neighborhoods, working with residents to understand and fight conditions that led to urban poverty. Following from the interests of philosophers like John Ruskin, a settlement house approach emphasized "education by permeation" with the insight that universities were essentially related to community (qtd. in Kraus 10). In 1902, Charles Booth reported that there were twelve settlement houses in

London alone and that these houses had begun an organized inquiry into the nature and causes of poverty and had begun to propose steps to fight its effects. Booth called for the settlement house movement to become "a laboratory for studies concerning the community" and rallied settlement house workers to build a social climate in which "relationships were restored" (qtd. in Kraus 23). Considering the social fragmentation occasioned by rapid industrialization in England's cities, Booth saw the settlement house as a social model that emphasized relationship and interdependence among people and community institutions. The settlement house model with its twin footholds in the community and the university enabled people to cross boundaries, allowing people to work together to improve the educational practice and cultural climate of their neighborhoods.

As the settlement house model moved across the seas from Britain to the United States, it underwent some unique, distinctively American adaptations caused by the heavy influx of immigrants from Europe in the early 1900's. During that time in Pittsburgh there were no public health clinics. Places like Community House designed their ground floors as mother-child spaces and milk distribution centers for infants. Older members of the Community House remember the names and faces of "settlement workers" who lived on its fifth floor. The legendary "Miss Felding," whose portrait hung in the lobby of the Community House, visited families in the neighborhood, developed household budgets with mothers at kitchen tables and, when the need arose, accosted errant fathers in local saloons and held them accountable to their families.

While settlement workers were often working "out in the community" visiting homes and schools, the main thrust of the settlement house agenda took place in the settlement house itself. Open seven days a week, the settlement house provided English and arithmetic instruction taught by settlement house workers and cooking classes taught by visiting nurses. There were a myriad of social, cultural, and religious clubs along with much needed recreation carried out in the houses' gymnasiums and pools. Settlement houses like Hull House in New York were also centers for national political advocacy. Fiery proponents of the movement like Jane Addams at Hull House, Graham Taylor, who founded Chicago Commons, or Everett Taylor of East Side Settlement House, held national convocations on the pressing problems of housing and education within the urban milieu, advocating for justice, from life experience.

World War One marked the end of these golden years as settlement houses faced growing funding problems. Largely dependent on resources beyond the local neighborhood, settlement houses were

often accused of being poor marriages of conscience and convenience (Karger). Although settlement houses were effective in helping to ensure a stable infrastructure within the cities by which immigrants could be assimilated into American society, they were also accused of being mechanisms of social control and of being constrained by their distant benefactors. According to this view, settlement houses were effective at mitigating poverty and lowering class conflict but were unable to effectively challenge the distribution of resources that created the conditions of poverty.

Settlement houses lacked from the start an articulated theory and set of methods to implement a vision of social change, instead, relying on committed individuals who used "whatever works" and whatever resources were available at the time. With no theory to sustain it and with diminished energy, enthusiasm, and funding rerouted to the war effort, the educational and activist mission of the early settlement house drifted. Settlement houses became spaces for recreational programs and socials, evident as early as the 1920's and 30's, when the main activities of the settlement house became basketball, swimming, and church functions.

The settlement house still provides fertile ground for social change, however. As a hospitable place for people of different backgrounds, it offers a potential warehouse of shared expertise—a place where people of difference can gather to dialogue. Its history provides an impetus to action in new and creative ways, the possibility of developing a community of shared learning. But one danger demonstrated by the history of the settlement house movement is that this learning can become less participatory when outsiders to the community who do not own nor fully understand its problems at a grassroots level begin to impose methods and values developed from outside in an uncritical and unreflective way. By the late 1950's, settlement house workers were replaced with professional social workers who lived outside of the neighborhoods in which they worked. Any educational activities that had survived in settlement houses were replaced with programs and services offered to clients and drop-ins at city clinics or agencies. The recreational programs that remained and which continue today in settlement houses often rely on the auspices of benefactors who rarely, if ever, enter their doors.

The Community Literacy Center seeks to reinvent the early settlement house vision of social change through inquiry and politically self-conscious cultural interaction. The groundwork for this vision is built on robust educational innovations and on literate practices that help inner-city residents build relationships and

strengthen their community through action-oriented writing and dialogue.[2]

PART II.

CREATING A DISCOURSE TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENCE: A THEORETICAL CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY LITERACY

When was the last time you talked seriously to someone of a different color about race?

—Senator Bill Bradley

In our racially and culturally mixed urban centers, especially in low-income city neighborhoods, the call for social change is often a call for a new or radically altered sense of community—for a better way to deal with diversity and difference among people by acknowledging rather than denying it (Harris). "Community" has been proposed as the missing dimension of contemporary political and social discussion, a key dimension that might enable commitment, connectedness, solidarity and meaning in our lives (Miller).

Amidst the turmoil of intercultural confrontations seen on the evening news, the abstract and politicized discourse of policy makers, cultural critics, and social service bureaucracies can obscure the human face of the problems and needs that stand before us. This problem has been recognized by our controversial secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Henry G. Cisneros, spending nights in homeless shelters around the country to educate himself about the problems of the homeless. He explained, "It's hard to make policies without understanding the complicated twists and turns of people's lives" (Dugger). Indeed, we have a need in this country to recognize and respect each others' humanity through what Rorty has called "imaginative identification with the details of each others' lives" (190). Justice is not simply a topic of discussion or a matter of policy; justice is a matter of persons, or more specifically, the relationships between persons, as Martin Luther King wrote decades ago in his Ph.D. thesis

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[2] In seeking to reinvent this tradition by building on a community/university collaboration, we have not, it must be clear, outlined the solution; we have *named* the problem. Such a collaboration not only poses the political and practical difficulties Langman and McLaughlin document, but in a far more unsettling way forces *both* partners to reinvent themselves--to rethink the very expertise in teaching or serving youth they bring to the project.

(qtd. in Oates 43). More recently, Cornel West, former head of the African-American Studies department at Princeton University, argued that those working on the cutting edge of social change are moving beyond mediation and becoming translators of each others' discourse. He claims that the discourse of the 90's is being created by acts of empathetic imagination among people of difference.

But in working towards social change that will create a more just and pluralistic society, how do social advocates shape discourse to deal with differences, tensions, and ambiguity in our inner-city communities? And how might such a discourse be shaped against a background of escalating urban violence? How might it be fashioned within the bounds of rhetoric, a field in which many have held that discourse, over violence, is the preferred means of social change, a tradition that seeks the participatory construction of new possibilities over coercive, revolutionary change (Toulmin)? Even when rhetoricians agree on tne need for social change, they often differ in the kind of discourse they would develop to address difference. Discourse in this sense means not only language but the available roles, motives, and strategies that support a transaction.

Consider three different visions of what this discourse, that deals with difference based on ethnic, cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds, can look like. For the sake of discussion, we can call these three visions *cultural literacy, the literacy of social and cultural critique,* and *community literacy.* Although individual practice may be eclectic, each of these three visions would take a different stance on literacy instruction and on three provocative questions which help organize our descriptions.

Question: Who *shapes this discourse for dealing with difference in our society and what kind of participatory relationships and roles are created in the process?* Rhetoricians argue about whether a single language or cultural tradition versus a plurality of relatively independent, culturally distinct discourses can be the basis for communicating across boundaries of class and race. Or, is it possible—or even desirable—to create new, intercultural *hybrids* of familiar literate practices?

Question: What *are the working places in which such a discourse can be tested and enacted?* For instance, the metatheoretical discourse developed in academic halls and classrooms stands in contrast to the discourse developed in grassroots, community groups and social service agencies. Although similarly created in the name of social change, the discourses that arise out of these various sites have served different purposes, have created different kinds of relationships and roles

among their users, and have different levels of "reach" in terms of their application and transfer across different knowledge contexts.

Consider some of the sites that recommend themselves. In the university, professors and students engage in critical theorizing about the role of the dominant language in creating and maintaining economic and cultural divisions in our society. However, it is also true that when this critical, intellectual discourse moves out of the academic circles in which it is generated and into the established communities that it speaks *of* and intends to speak *for*, it is often inaccessible, unable to speak *to* those communities or to help conflicted neighborhoods develop productive dialogue. In addition to this critical discourse, universities have, since the establishment of open admission policies and basic writing programs in the 70's, developed college curricula that teach the language of power to the disenfranchised and that seek to initiate non-traditional students into the academic community. Textbooks provide discourses that aim to deal with difference; dictionaries of cultural literacy, multicultural anthologies, and various kinds of liberatory pedagogies are now used with more frequency in public schools and in community college classrooms. In sum, these academic discourses tend either to acculturate students in or prompt them to take a critical stance towards dominant discourse practices.

In contrast to these, other discourses attempt to deal with difference outside of the academy, in the milieu of inner-city communities. The discourse of social service is largely based on a therapeutic model, designed to give low-income residents greater access to services in the welfare system by providing the insider knowledge and practices needed to obtain aid. In this social service discourse, relationships are often organized around the language of "deficits," "clients," and "entitlements." Although it creates bridges between low-income individuals and mainstream America, it often does not actively seek to promote change. By contrast, the discourse of community organization, also strongly established in urban settings, prompts marginalized groups (e.g., a local union fighting a large corporation) to challenge power and change the social structure through oppositional rhetoric and action, as seen in the methods of Saul Alinsky. And yet another strand of community organization discourse, seen in grassroots, community development efforts, works to acculturate limited numbers of low-income residents into the practices of capitalism and economic power.

These discourses of universities and communities sometimes rub shoulders with a liberatory discourse that emerges out of African-American and third world religious communities in figures

such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Paulo Freire. Their call for social change personalizes the human dimension of poverty in a way that talks across diverse groups in society. This discourse puts people in contact with human dignity and suffering beyond their own experience, calling on us to challenge inequities and transform the way we see and interact with each other.

The purpose of this brief tour was to suggest how these alternative discourses represent highly situated ways of knowing and acting shaped by the places in which they flourish. One final question moves beyond a descriptive discussion of these different discourses to ask about the consequences of creating them.

Question: *What are the inevitable obstacles and tradeoffs in developing a discourse that deals with difference?* As any discourse attempts to solve problems that arise out of difference, it will inevitably have to deal with questions of who is represented, who holds power and whose interpretation counts. Will problems be defined in such a way that all are represented or only the most vocal and powerful? Will the discourse practices used serve to enable or suppress different groups of people in the name of dealing with difference?

If our aim is to develop *bridging discourses*, language and practices that integrate cultural traditions and facilitate intercultural communication, we must ask ourselves if this is even possible. Anthropologists are quick to point out that total understanding and fluency within an unfamiliar culture is difficult if not impossible. Can a mutual language ever truly be created? What gets lost in the translation? How are identities shaped or lost or gained? Although the dominant discourse of American culture opens its arms and beckons the "illiterate" to join its ranks and learn its practices, how many speakers of the dominant discourse regularly visit and attempt to participate in the discourse of marginalized groups in our society? Ironically, there exist unspoken taboos and fears about travel of this sort.

The three discourses we sketch below deal differently with the need for interaction in diverse urban communities, each grappling with the provocative open questions of who should create such a discourse, where can it flourish, and how it should deal with problems of power and interpretation.

Cultural Literacy

Cultural literacy creates a discourse that seeks to minimize and eradicate difference. Proponents of cultural literacy affirm a vision of community built around a particular, shared set of values, language, conventions, and forms. As E. D. Hirsch, Alan Bloom, and others have envisioned it, cultural literacy heals the ruptures in our society and creates unity by assimilating difference into the history of mainstream America, imposing a largely white, western discourse on all Americans as the *lingua franca*. Mainstream proponents of cultural literacy see power in preserving and valuing the distinctiveness of one community's discourse. Some marginalized groups in our society have also argued for a kind of cultural literacy in which the specific tribal identities of one group or another (e.g., black nationalists or white supremacists) are valued above all others.

Anthropology and descriptive linguistics not only define but provide tools that celebrate the distinctive habits of mind and language that create insiders and outsiders, that supply the "identity kit" that comes with being a native speaker or that emerge through the slow process of apprenticeship or acculturation. The community may be academic discourse that opens (and closes) doors to higher education (Gee), or British working class 'lads' learning the oppositional strategies that maintain their subclass status (Willis), or the literate practices of black and white poor of Tracton and Roadville which prepare children to fail in school in predictable and distinctive ways (Heath).

These variations on the theme of "cultural literacy" build community with the powerful tools of a shared language and shared literate practices. They can help individuals develop pride and a sense of identity. At the same time, this cohesiveness can also lead to ethnic ghettoizing, to calls for ethnic purity, where inclusion is defined by an equally powerful drive to exclusion, where difference is less a fact than a rallying cry. Cultural literacy often overlooks individual difference and can enforce homogeneity, leading to a straight jacket of political correctness, discouraging reflective thought and action. Cultural literacy can create wider divisions and boundaries between groups of people who may need to develop meaningful dialogues that cross the barriers of difference and support productive working relationships.

Proponents of *multi*culturalism do not seek to eradicate difference through assimilation but to celebrate and understand difference. Multiculturalists oppose the imposition of one, monolithic discourse that devours difference under the guise of inclusion, advocating an "I'm o.k., You're o.k." philosophy of peaceful

co-existence. In valuing difference and in attempting to preserve the special integrity of cultural groups, multiculturalism, in practice, has rarely gone beyond the methods of exposure and appreciation, however. In a multicultural curriculum, children of different cultural groups often celebrate and learn about each others' traditions, but they rarely engage in purposeful interaction or reflective dialogue between groups for the goal of taking action or solving a shared problem. The goal of multiculturalism is not to create an intercultural discourse that will allow cooperative problem-solving, but simply to appreciate and respect difference. Such an approach has, perhaps, gained a wide acceptance because it has avoided the value-laden tangle of decisions about power that come with the more complex agenda of merging and integrating cultural practices for change.

Rieff takes an even more skeptical stance, arguing that, in practice, multiculturalism promotes consumerism rather than justice. Although mass consumption of different cultures (whether knick-knacks from Pier 1 Imports or the new "product line" available in university course catalogues) reflects a certain kind of democratic participation in the market (all cultures now have a seat on department store shelves), this kind of participation does not eradicate serious class difference within our society. In some ways, multiculturalists depend on a strategy similar to those who promote cultural literacy; they manage difference by affirming the value of distinct, culturally defined discourses (not one, but many), with the caveat that discourses of all cultures are equally valuable.

If our goal is to address problems in our urban communities and to develop productive working relationships with others, then we cannot depend on the traditions and practices that have been etched in one particular cultural discourse or another, especially if we wish to involve all stakeholders. Instead, we must learn to treat cultural practices as resources that can be selected, adapted, and combined for the purpose of creating social change and justice. Some features of a cultural discourse *may* be more valuable than other features, depending on the immediate goal at hand and the nature of the problems we address. Thus, we believe that hybrid, intercultural discourse practices are necessary to address the problems we jointly recognize in our communities. But what kind of methods and practices can enable this kind of intercultural interpretation, negotiation, and problem- solving? Can the rhetoric of social advocacy and critique attain such a goal?

The Literacy of Social and Cultural Critique

While cultural literacy envisions social change in terms of creating a single intra-community discourse or preserving the discourses of alternative or marginalized sub-cultures, the rhetoric of advocacy and cultural critique builds a relationship between these subcommunities. However, this relationship is often defined by struggle and supported by an agonistic, oppositional rhetoric. Proponents of this literacy deal with difference through tactics of resistance and overthrow. Difference is defined as a struggle for power, and discourse can be an effective weapon in the fight. Within inner cities, Alinksy's *Rules for Radicals* has long been a handbook for community organizing which operates by seizing control of a discourse, disrupting the "normal" patterns of communication, and staging deliberate confrontations. Alinsky's discourse of activism operates on a confrontational dynamic that can lead to intractable debate and obstruction by both sides. Although Alinsky presented this discourse as a last resort approach reserved for situations where the balance of power is so unequal that negotiating strategies are doomed to failure, many community groups have adopted this combative approach as standard procedure. Resistance itself becomes a *raison d'être* —the very purpose and the thread that knits together some groups, even when the real threat of an enemy or oppressor has faded. The risks of persisting in such combative discourse are high, resulting in sweeping factionalism and abiding, irreparable rifts in community relations.[3]

In current academic circles, critical theory likewise recognizes the ways social power structures maintain barriers between the privileged and oppressed, responding with a discourse of critique. In attempting to enfranchise differences and cultural values that mainstream society marginalizes, critical theory divides the world into fringes and dominant camps, which critics claim are doomed to replicate the institutionalized structures that support them. Critique is an essential practice that can prepare individuals for change by asking them to

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[3] In the late 1980's, members of the Denominational Mission Strategy who used Alinsky strategies challenged the corporate power structure of Pittsburgh by picketing CEOs attending a prominent church, shouting obscenities, and sprinkling pungent mink oil on the congregation, to draw attention to unemployment in Pittsburgh's once thriving mill towns. Although the violence and jail terms that ensued over a period of weeks called national attention to spreading poverty in Pittsburgh's Mon Valley and while this obstructive strategy focused attention on the corporate elite's insensitivity to the problem, the DMS strategy backfired. Public attention shifted from the plight of the unemployed workers to sympathy for the terrorized children of the congregation who had witnessed these acts of intimidation.

examine their position in and assumptions about the world. Such a discourse allows individuals to recognize themselves as oppressed and perhaps, even unwittingly oppressive to others. But the discourse of critique offers few strategies for change other than resisting dominant discourse practices. Critique alone can not be used in service to a constructive agenda, one that would require strategies for *using* criticisms to rebuild existing discourses into more participatory ones. While critique interrogates the boundaries we want to move through, it does not reveal what awaits us on the other side. Criticism mobilizes discontent, offering strategies of revolution along with the hope that the victors in such situations will somehow be more just than their predecessors. We believe that critique is necessary but not sufficient for building a just society, for critique does not in itself articulate the "somehow" of this promise. Without a clear vision and strategy for change, critique is an incomplete discourse for the purposes we have set forth.

Community Literacy

When one goes "on the street" in urban communities, one can see yet another road to social action in a vigorous hands-on literacy that "values written discourse from the margins of society." In it, members of an inner-city neighborhood use writing literally to "compose" themselves for action (Peck vi.). These everyday literate practices are transactional, inherently collaborative, and action-oriented. Problem solving takes precedence over canonical texts. Writing itself becomes inseparable from purposeful conversation between allies, stakeholders, constituents, or neighbors. The community writers Peck describes, talk to neighbors, scribble notes for arguments they may later present to city council, solicit each other's help in composing formal letters of complaint, and interpret and communicate ideas in a growing network of supporters. This dynamic use of literacy grows out of the dilemmas of urban life. "Happening in neighborhoods, on doorsteps and in alleys, on street corners and in union halls, in food banks and in shelters for the homeless, community literate practices are utilized wherever people collaborate and use literate means to construct shared purposes and to take action" (Peck 8).

Community literacy, as we shall describe it, is a third vision of dealing with difference that combines these on-the-street, collaborative and action-centered features of urban literacy *with* a set of rhetorical practices typically valued in the academy—specifically strategies for exploring open questions and building arguments through structured inquiry.

We are drawn to community literacy as a third type of discourse that, like cultural critique, seeks to acknowledge difference rather than absorb it and to challenge the existence of closed communities where only a few can play. But in place of the oppositional rhetoric of advocacy, community literacy envisions a rhetoric of inquiry, where multiple positions and perspectives are considered to reach mutual goals. In place of multicultural programs of simply appreciating or becoming consumers of difference and diversity, this discourse works toward an *intercultural conversation* for the purpose of change.

Its approach to difference is most evident in the context of a practical problem such as the history of failed landlord/tenant relations in integrated neighborhoods. In the discourse of grassroots politics, entrenched positions are typically presented and predictable responses are recited by the vocal few who talk at the table. Community literacy expands the table by bringing into conversation multiple and often unheard perspectives, such as tenants who may not understand or relate to the technical language of Pennsylvania law or housing authority policy, but who may bring a wealth of insight and experience to bear on the problem. But community literacy means more than simply representing these different views in conversation. It seeks to restructure the conversation itself into a collaboration in which individuals share expertise and experience through the act of planning and writing about problems they must jointly define. The aim is not to resolve the differences that arise in a mixed, working group, but to use diversity as a resource for addressing specific problems and needs in creative ways.

The practice of community literacy that we shall describe here attempts to accept and bridge difference by creating a discourse of shared problem-solving. The goal of this discourse is to acknowledge not only the difficulty of empathy and the history of failed conversations, but the genuine conflicts created by differences of race, culture, gender, age, social and economic positions—the undercurrents that tear cities apart. There is, however, all the difference in the world between acknowledging that your ways are different from mine (which may be read as "inexplicable, unpredictable and maybe not as desirable as mine") and actively exploring the logic of how you and I are using our literate practices to make meaning—how we are using discourse to cope with poverty, to cement personal relations, or to deal with each other. Such an exploration is not done in an atmosphere of opposition or appropriation, but in the hard-to-achieve climate of genuine inquiry. Seeking such understanding is not, however, an end in itself. It does not erase the conflicting interests. It could even reinforce the sense of our separate agendas.

In community literacy that is why inquiry and understanding are yoked to the goal of producing something—a joint document, resolution, a shared problem definition, memorandum of understanding, or collaborative plan of action. The discourse of community literacy works with, around, and through difference to solve personal and community problems, to achieve mutual goals. In addition, this focus on mutual ends leads community literacy to produce *hybrid* texts. Consider Mark's rap—that is to say his performance to the drum beat of the neighborhood, the lyrics he projected overhead at the community conversation, the interpretation of his rap that his peers, Shay La and Indie provided for the audience and for a white reporter—all embedded in the conventions of a formal presentation, of a published newsletter read by school officials, of a city paper, and of the nightly news. Mark's literate act is in fact an assembly of voices, conventions, and rhetorical strategies from street talk, popular media, oral traditions, and mainstream published discourse. The texts that emerge from the CLC are often such hybrids, as writers experiment with a new array of rhetorical strategies and as they are drawn by the need to speak to multiple readers (other teens, parents, school board officials, an amorphous public) with multiple voices of celebration, advocacy, expose´, and reasoned recommendation. Community literacy draws from multiple, available cultural traditions, including university voices of analysis, reason giving, and strategy and the community voices of consensus building and action. In short, it responds to the problem of difference with a discourse of intercultural inquiry. However, unlike academic inquiry, community literacy is located in working, intercultural relationships. It is dedicated to action on mutual problems of a community created by practical and ethical ties.

PART III.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY LITERACY: PRIORITIES AND COMMITMENTS

Community literacy is, of course, a convenient abstraction. Its reality is a family of locally situated practices. At Pittsburgh's CLC the vision of community literacy sketched above becomes a pressing question of practice. As educators we have been asking, what are the conditions that would pull urban teenagers, college student mentors, community residents, and ourselves into a working, intercultural discourse? In trying to articulate the priorities and commitments that shape this experiment with community literacy, we are not trying to mount a generalized argument for what educators in any setting ought to do. These problems admit multiple solutions, just as the literacies noted earlier achieve valuable though different goals than ours. But

each choice comes with trade-offs we should try to recognize. More importantly, ideals and great ideas do not come with operating instructions. The claim we do make is that community literacy must be shaped in a process of inquiry, observation-based theory building and praxis.[4]

Developing the Community Literacy Center for the past five years has been an inquiry into what theory can mean in practice and into what the practice of community literacy can teach us. John Dewey lays the groundwork for this reflective, experimental stance when he argues that both ethical action and education are in essence a process of inquiry. Dewey is critical of policy based on "fixed, eternal ends" (76), that is, on abstract value claims we might assert, whether they are for cultural unity, the redistribution of resources, or the restructuring of institutional power. This "ideal of certainty" as he calls it, can lead, on the one hand, to the inaction of merely "meaning well," paying lip service to an unrealizable ideal. On the other, it leads to the kind of dogmatism in which the end justifies the means. Consider the contradictory acts done in the name of *justice* and what such definitions of justice might ask us to do in an urban neighborhood. Our desire to cling to unquestioned, foundational, a priori principles is based, he says, on a "fancy" whose "natural home is not in the future, but in the dim past or in some distant and supposedly better part of the world" (78).

In the ethical and educational inquiry Dewey maps out, these fixed ends are replaced with what he calls "ends-in-view;" they become aims that "arise and function within action" (70). Equally important, one's aims are subjected to the test of philosophical pragmatism: the meaning of each provisional aim or end is defined by its consequences. Pragmatism would, for instance, urge theorists of cultural, of critical, and of community literacies to ask how these discourses function when teenagers use them to understand the daily conflicts in

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[4] In defining the process with these terms, we are calling on three key traditions: one is the educational pragmatism of Dewey and James that locates the meaning of and the justification for a practice in an unflinching inquiry into its outcomes and consequences. Another is the commitment of cognitive rhetoric and educational research to building (and testing) theory on the close observation of actual readers and writers in action--a process that can challenge our elegant, but sometimes merely academic constructs of what "should" be the case (Flower, "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building"). And finally, this inquiry depends on Freire's notion of praxis where the meaning of strong values like the meaning of theory is expressed in action, but tested, questioned, and refined in reflection. As all these traditions stress, although inquiry is an interpretive, constructive act, it can not be conducted from an armchair or shielded from the way the world instantiates an educator's vision.

schools that lead to the disproportionately high suspension rate of African-American males in city schools. How do these literacies let teens talk to themselves, to each other, and to school officials and to what effect—not in theory but in practice? Dewey argues that when we see our cherished values as ends-in-view or working goals they become "terminals of deliberation" and "turning points in activity" that constantly throw us back into the inquiry (70). Taking a critical look at aims means evaluating both the *consequences* and the *conditions* for action. In contrast,

> the doctrine of fixed ends not only diverts attention from examination of consequences and the intelligent creation of purpose, but since means and ends are two ways of regarding the same actuality, it also renders [individuals] careless in their inspection of existing conditions (77).

For instance, the aim of community literacy is to build a discourse in which people not only acknowledge difference (e.g., urban teens and university mentors can talk about race), but in which people do productive work together. If so, what are the conditions already in place that will affect such relations—what does the space we are walking into look like? Can a mere atmosphere of openness and invitation to talk erase a history of racism? Or how will a mentor's passive goodwill, based on the expectation of being asked for help, fare in the face of a teenager's strategy of skepticism, invulnerability, and testing? In short, the theory of community literacy we are trying to develop here is in fact an inquiry into the conditions for and consequences of four aims that define the priorities and commitments of the CLC. We would like to present these aims, anchored in brief vignettes, as points of departure, a working hypothesis for how one might translate the goals of community literacy into educational practice.

1. The Community Literacy Center is dedicated to social change and action.

Carnegie Mellon students often come to mentoring with assumptions that reflect two dominant views of literacy instruction. Some expect to help community residents "improve and correct" their writing, seeing the goal of writing as the production of a text that meets the conventions of standard written English and mainstream discourse—the very discourse demanded of college students. Other mentors come hoping to open the gates of self-expression and help teenagers at the CLC "find their own voice," seeing writing as both self-discovery and the creation of creative, poetic texts. Each set of

expectations reflects strong traditions in composition teaching. "Textual literacy" as it has been called, centers attention on texts—on polished, edited, mainstream-acceptable text (Brandt). Indeed, the phrase "literacy program" is strongly associated with basic reading programs (for "illiterate" adults who can not use institutional texts) or with the attempts of open admissions programs to teach standard English or literacy skills needed in school (writing essays) or the workplace (following instructions and filing reports) (Goodlad, Richardson). There is a strong atmosphere of remediation around this tradition of literacy with its focus on correctness, conventions and style (Rose).

In contrast, the expressive tradition of poetic writing and belles lettres celebrates creative potential and the power of writing to foster personal discovery and growth. It brings outsiders into the privileged discourse of belles lettres through reading, appreciating, and emulating esteemed authors (Willinsky). The workshop method in which writers share drafts gives even children the status of "author." And it has also produced some vigorous bursts of community writing (e.g., Krawiec). Nevertheless, this paradigm asserts the centrality of the crafted text and the fine art of writing. Its strong individualistic emphasis, plus a veneration of talent and practice, makes it suspicious of research and explicit teaching and uncomfortable with collaborative writing.

The CLC comes to writing from yet a different angle—rhetoric. In the educational tradition of rhetoric and with the research perspective of cognitive rhetoric, the writer stands in the midst of a conversation or argument. Writing is a tool in the social transactions between writers and readers. It is both a strategic, social act and a private thinking process which we can study, teach, learn, and do. At the CLC, community literacy is a goal-directed process dedicated to social change; it is a form of action in both the community and the lives of the writers. Work to foster an individual's discovery of an authentic, personal voice (and his or her growing control of the textual conventions of power) is embedded within an agenda for change and for the creation of a discourse that deals with difference.

In this discourse, text is not an end in itself. Writing is a tool. Transactional writing (unlike its expressive counterpart) must inform or persuade; it must be attuned not just to the writer's feelings but the needs and response of the intercultural community it hopes to challenge, inform, or move to action. Being heard is not easy. Heath and McLaughlin's study of inner city youth and their neighborhood-based organizations describes an urban site they call "River City." Here, McLaughlin notes "community responses to youth

offer few forums for the voices of youth to be heard, and heavy-handed, authoritarian European traditions characterize youth organizations. Youngsters have little legitimate presence at the community level, and city government, by the report of insiders, has not been very effective in working with or for youth" (41).

As a tool for political and social civility (Erickson) community literacy attempts to address a mixed, complex audience with hybrid texts that cross the conventions of mainstream discourse and the boundaries of genre. Taking this rhetorical stance, teens move from trying to articulate their own complex attitudes toward teen pregnancy (that differ from the adult party line) to writing a handbook for young mothers. They enter into the city's debate over school restructuring, meeting with the Superintendent of Schools and Head of the School Board, interviewing other teens and parents and publishing a newsletter, "If I Had a Choice" followed by "Risk and Respect" which challenges the schools to see the links between violence in and out of school. As a result of these documents (later requested by the city's school reorganization committee), CLC writers become the first teenagers in the history of school board elections to interrogate candidates on a televised program mounted by a public action group.

That said, we should not assume that teenagers come prepared to enter such a discourse, to move from complaint or assertion to strategic, savvy action, to understand how the slow wheels of public persuasion work, to value persistence, or even to believe in the power of their own voice, to see that writing can make a difference. There are good reasons for attitudes of indifference, learned helplessness, and retreat. As McLaughlin notes, "the priority or lack of priority afforded to youth gives off powerful signals to youth about their value, social legitimacy, and future" (43). Teens in the school suspension project were wary: "Hey, if this is like some lame English class, I'm outta here. . . ." They were equally skeptical that the adult project leaders would or could arrange meetings for teens to present their ideas about policy and the causes of suspension to school administrators. They told about past encounters with their school principal, mimicking the way he and other teachers cut them off, held up "five fingers" and pointed to the door, meaning the students were put on five days out-of-building suspension, no discussion. "*That man* gonna listen to *us?* Yeah, right," one teen commented, while another added, "Won't make no difference anyhow; they're gonna do what they're gonna do."

Skeptical as they were, nine of the eleven endured in the project, and as they carved out their own space to talk and express their views they began, on their own, to write outside of our sessions as well. Jacquon, who disdained his high school English class, found his way to

a computer lab during a study hall in school. He was eager to share his insight that students deliberately broke the "dumbest rules" (e.g., wearing a hat) just to go on a three day pass, where they usually got into more trouble on street corners. He typed a crude but insightful "position paper" and talked the school secretary into running off copies. On the day his principal was scheduled to visit the Literacy Center, he surprised us all with handouts, eager to make a place for his argument at the table. After weeks of rivaling each other's positions and role playing the school's response, these teens were ready to make a powerful statement that would not be cut off but, in fact, would lead to a document now being used by school staff to revise suspension policies. As Mark put it, the strategies of community literacy had helped him do something he was once unsure of—to "say what I wanted to say but in a way that people would listen"—well thought out claims that did not rely on insult or threat.

Social action takes many local forms. And if writers (teen and adult) are to become literate in a community sense, they must develop a sense of themselves as agents of change. In one CLC project, for example, 10 landlords and tenants from across the city analyzed problems collaboratively to plan and write a readable landlord/tenant handbook, something yet to be accomplished by local housing agencies. As representatives from local agencies were invited to read and discuss the book in a CLC forum, those with more "professional" expertise came to see problems in their own ways of communicating. They discovered that the brochures and forms used at many agencies were simply not adapted to the needs and skills of the landlords and tenants who need them most. The landlord/tenant collaboration had produced a better product and a better model for communicating about real problems—a readable handbook that many tenants and housing organizations are now using because of its grassroots appeal, its realistic scenarios that people relate to, and its practical worksheets for figuring budgets, filing complaints, and negotiating rental issues. The shared expertise that emerges in collaborative planning and writing can push ideas into action.

2. Community literacy supports intercultural conversation.

Adrienne Rich has described the power of language as "the drive to connect. The dream of a common language" (8). In surprising ways, the experience of many participants within community literacy projects confirms Rich's observation. Initially, writers and mentors who join community literacy projects are lured by the very human impulse to connect across boundaries of culture and consciousness through literate action. When interviewed, they tell of their curiosity and desire to be part of a broader cultural exchange which can link writing and

grassroots action. They want to be engaged in projects that offer the opportunity to write and act in ways that move beyond the boundaries of the "hood" on the one hand or the walls of the classroom on the other. A mentor, majoring in architectural studies, expressed his desire to test what he was learning in the classroom in the midst of a community literacy project that focused on safe and affordable housing in a blighted neighborhood. A teenager, unsure of her gifts as a writer but certain of her desire to go to college in order to leave her housing project joined a community literacy project to "check out" what college students were like. One explanation for the attraction to these community literacy projects for urban residents and college students can be found in the desire that the participants bring—the dream of connecting with a broader community, learning to operate within unfamiliar discourses, creating new meanings and literate practices powerful enough to form bridges across old boundaries. But dreams need materiality and methods.

Community literacy projects transform the impulse to connect across boundaries into a project-based form of education where everyone is called to learn new strategies for planning, arguing, and mentoring. These projects invite participants to move beyond static models of multiculturalism where boundaries between communities may be regarded as fixed and literate practices as specific and limited to "in groups." *Interculturalism* better describes literate interactions of people engaging in boundary-crossing encounters that call for negotiation. The goal of these intercultural interactions is to produce a new consensus that results in useful work in the community.

In an urban context, an intercultural agenda must stand against things as well as for new possibilities. Interculturalism demands a suspicion of colonizing rhetorics that work to impose a dominant discourse upon a working group. At the same time, interculturalism demands a corresponding willingness to create hybrid texts that draw upon shared expertise within the group. The"Whassup with Suspension," project illustrates how teenagers adapted the discourse of school policy and procedure to reform the out-of-school suspension process. Intercultural discourse depends on a set of attitudes and a repertoire of strategic actions to explore and cross boundaries between communities. In the process, boundaries become not only discourse barriers that separate but also places of relationship and encounter with persons from other communities (McQuade).

The Problem

"Whassup with Suspension" was a community response to teenagers drifting away from Pittsburgh high schools, a response fueled

by the rising rate of out of school suspension among African-American males. Its goal was to create a responsible proposal for change that reflected the thinking of the teenagers who were being suspended. Secondly, this literacy project let those teenagers identify other stakeholders in the community who were also implicated in the suspension process: teachers and vice principals who were doing the suspending, parents and community residents who were concerned about their children, as well as their peers.

Coming to the Table

An intercultural conversation on community problems like school suspension brings together people who normally do not sit down and solve problems together. The question is how to create an atmosphere of respect, a commitment to equity, and an acknowledgment of the multiple forms of expertise at the table.

Imagine a series of expanding round table conversations in the Community Literacy Center, organized around the problems of suspension. Initially, eleven teenagers, each supported by a community mentor, are seated at the table. At first, the talk around the table deals mostly with teenagers' complaints about the suspension process. They are frankly skeptical that anything can be done and don't believe that any adult is going to listen. They complain of not feeling at ease, feeling like they do not count or belong in school. They believe that teachers and administrators deliberately talk above their heads. Not one of these teenagers has a strong track record of participation in large group activities. Their discourse is, overwhelmingly, a recital of complaint and blame. They see themselves as loners and outlaws and feel like victims. Stocking caps covering corn rows are pulled low down to the eyebrow, long bulky rapper coats are the order of the day. Some slouch, others sleep or stare off into the distance. These are teenagers who are not easily engaged in discussion.

Gathered around the table, also in the initial phases of the project, are the community mentors who have been trained in the roles of being a supporter and collaborative planner for a teenage writer. These mentors bring a wide range of age and experience to the table. Some are savvy community activists who enjoy being involved in community activities that they feel are on the edge; others are more naive volunteers, who at first have to struggle to connect with the experience of the teenagers and the flippant ways they talk about their teachers and their school experience. Cultural worlds collide as experiences are shared, questions asked, responses given, paragraphs begun. At this point the dominant discourse remains that of complaint and blame as teenagers voice what troubles them most. The

syntax is rough, the claims strong, the indictment of the entire school clear in the teenager's eyes. Of special interest to the teenagers is the cataloguing of grievances, specific instances of insulting behaviors by teachers and principals. Talk centers around the stylized dismissive gestures of certain teachers and principals who routinely and abruptly terminate discussion during conflict situations. Students see such behaviors as arbitrary, as power moves that adults in power can make at any time to strip teenagers of their dignity in public and end discussion. So teenagers resist. They "play" the adults. They know the system, test it's limits, they get suspended, so what? What do you expect from the man? After a number of such sessions the teenagers seem ready to engage in a larger dialogue. They invite "reasonable" teachers and administrators to the table.

The second phase of the conversation begins as teachers and administrators are asked to respond to the teenagers' writing. Some teachers and administrators seem glad to be there, pleased to find a place outside of school to talk about situations they too regard as unproductive and, in some cases, unconscionable. Others are a bit more defensive. They agree with the teenagers about some of the problems. But they also see themselves as the people whose responsibility it is to keep order. As one vice principal wearily remarked, "I really don't have the time during the day to try to understand what is happening. . . just to do things that stop the bad behavior. My day is one of these things (disciplinary episodes) after another."

When the teenagers' discourse of complaint and blame collides with the schools' discourse of policy and procedure, predictably, the conversation has its ups and downs. The discussion takes a turn into uncharted territory when teachers begin to ask the teenagers to see it from their side, asking them to consider what they would do, if their roles were reversed. The litany of complaint shifts to a discussion of procedures, options, and possible choices open to students, teachers, and administrators. Progressively, they begin to talk about policy problems and alternatives. As the discussion continues, they create hybrid texts where consequences of the suspension system are discussed. Jacquon points out that teenagers sometimes intentionally break the rules (by wearing hats) in order to get a three day vacation. Curtis quickly points out the problem with out of school suspensions is that teenagers place themselves at risk, hanging out at "hustling spots" where violence and crime happen. Lists of problems, disagreements, and agreements are collected and the teachers and administrators dismissed with an invitation to be participants again in the final community conversation at the completion of the project.

In the end, the teenagers decided to publish their writing in an eight-page newsletter which denounced mindless authoritarianism by adults, illustrated feelings of both students and teachers involved in suspension disputes, and gave a series of dramatic scenarios for understanding how suspensions occur. Raps, followed by explanatory commentaries, sat next to statements of alternative goals and actions both students and teachers could pursue. The hybrid policy discourse that emerged went beyond the school's former rule-based approach, which stressed enforcing order, to an approach that concentrated on maintaining respect and sensitivity among all the individuals trying to think through what to do in a sticky situation. Dialogues between teachers and students showed a teenager's view of how specific feelings and behaviors triggered authoritarian responses by adults. Since the scenarios were written by the same teenagers who were getting suspended, the teenagers felt they had a say in shaping the discussion. They wanted a voice in the outcomes. Negotiation at the points of conflict became more of a possibility when the teenagers felt there was some mutuality in the decision-making and the teachers and administrators not only got some respect but gave it as well.

Intercultural knowledge gained in community literacy projects thus tends not to be text book knowledge but an experiential kind of learning that depends upon diverse viewpoints shared by people who have a stake in a community problem. As the example suggests, an intercultural discourse invites people to negotiate not only differences in social and cultural backgrounds but to engage in diverse discourses. An interesting feature of this kind of learning is the acknowledgment that the initial strategies any person brings to the table are usually insufficient to solve the problem. For instance, the discourse of complaint and blame could not solve the problem of suspension just the rhetoric of authoritarianism used by adults only made the problem worse. An intercultural approach using strategies of collaborative planning and rivaling enabled participants to discern the shortcomings of individual approaches and to adapt their discourses to form a new proposal, parts of which school officials later incorporated into the suspension policy.

3. Community literacy thrives in an atmosphere of problem solving and a culture of learning where strategies for planning, collaboration, argument, and reflection are explicitly discussed.

Can education—or only experience—open doors to this new discourse? When a discourse is already well-established, there are various ways to enter it. The best by far is to be born into it, because the alternative is likely to be the slow, uncertain process of acculturation (Gee). But time is a luxury we may not have. Basic writers unprepared for academic discourse, for instance, often struggle through the uncertain process of imitation and slow initiation (Bartholomae).

The Barriers to Entry

The discourse we are envisioning, however, is made not found. In constructing and entering an intercultural discourse, the slow clock of acculturation is not feasible, and the tacit, unreflective learning it builds may not be desirable. Lisa Delpit, an African-American educator talking about her experience as an ethnographer in Alaskan native communities, argues for making the tacit explicit.

> I have found it unquestionably easier—psychologically and pragmatically—when some kind soul has directly informed me about such matters as appropriate dress, interactional styles, embedded meanings, and taboo words or actions. I contend that it is much the same for anyone seeking to learn the rules of the culture of power. *Unless one has the leisure of a lifetime of "immersion" to learn them, explicit presentations makes learning immeasurably easier*" (italics added) (283).

However, just what knowledge should be put on the table? What should a mutual education for intercultural work do? For instance, Banks (one of the most prolific theorists of multicultural education (Ogbu)) criticizes various models of multicultural education that emphasize differences and deficiencies, because they miss the real problems (Banks). The real barriers to understanding, he argues, are the conflicting bodies of knowledge (the interpretations, facts, explanations) people bring to a common topic (such as the nature of economic opportunity in America or the history of slavery). To illustrate how his five types of knowledge can conflict, consider the *personal/cultural* knowledge a minority student might bring to the "myth" of opportunity from his home experience growing up in a project. Imagine how this would be in conflict with the *popular* knowledge of the media and movies, and with *mainstream academic* knowledge on American history—as well as the *school* knowledge (derived from the academic mainstream) supplied by teachers and textbooks. Banks' final category, *transformative academic* knowledge, often challenges the myths of mainstream academic and popular knowledge (much as E. B. DuBois did for the history of slavery), and can correct the misperceptions of personal/cultural interpretations.

In science, such challenges can precipitate a paradigm shift in what counts as knowledge, but in the humanities and social sciences, diverse accounts of our common experience tend to coexist in the literature and in peoples' minds (Banks 7). Banks' multicultural education, then, lets students examine how knowledge is constructed and learn to critically examine both their own prior assumptions and those of mainstream culture.

Ogbu, a prominent researcher in minority education, affirms that such programs do indeed have the power to "foster pride in minority culture. . . develop new insights into their culture, reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and promote cultural understanding" (Ogbu 6). However, he argues that understanding is not enough to change the status quo, to allow minorities to succeed in school. In the same spirit, we feel the rhetorical problem of working in the midst of difference calls for more assertive literate practices that go beyond the celebration of difference or beyond Banks' examination of conflicting assumptions and beliefs.

Cognitive rhetoric (the study of writers as thinkers) lets us define the problem this way: the writers at the Community Literacy Center are engaged in a process of *constructing* a negotiated *meaning*, doing so in the face of multiple, often conflicting goals, values, and ideas. As writers confront the hard issues of violence, risk, and respect and envision an audience of teens, teachers, school officials, media, neighborhood residents, politicians, and academics, these outer forces become inner voices shaping the writer's thoughts. Consider the different bodies of knowledge, the attitudes and values, the strategies for persuasion, the social expectations, and the rhetorical demands this event calls into play. Writing calls into being a metaphoric circle of inner *voices* and outer *forces*—voices that speak their advice and demands within the mind of an individual writer who must negotiate this press of possibilities. In an intercultural discourse—in which writers are attempting to listen to an even broader exchange of inner and outer voices, to explore more options and alternatives, to entertain more constraints, connect with more people—meaning making can not rest with the expression of personal feeling; it can not be the mere reproduction of received wisdom. Meaning making becomes an act of *negotiation* in the face of conflict (Flower, *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning*).

Learning to Negotiate A Discourse

This is why we place education at the center of community literacy's intercultural conversation. The process we want to foster is one in which writers construct a negotiated meaning, rising to greater reflective awareness of the multiple voices and sometimes conflicting forces their meaning needs to entertain. The understandings writers come to in text are a provisional resolution constructed in the middle of an internal conversation. As we will see in the struggle of Pierre, writers negotiate (arbitrate) the power relations among conflicting voices as well as negotiate (navigate) the best path among multiple conflicting goods. Such negotiation is not "giving in" or settling for less, but reaching for a more complex version of best. Against a

backdrop of face-to-face negotiations of social and cultural difference, writers at the Center are also learning to conduct internal negotiations with voices in their own minds to construct new, more responsive meanings that support a desperately needed, working community conversation.

In community literacy, writing is a response to crisis, to conflict, or a need for action. It calls for critical awareness, strategic thinking, and reflective learning—a style of learning that unlike the slow shaping of acculturation can rapidly reflect on itself, experiment, and adapt. Writers at the CLC, including the present authors, enter a community of learners where explicit strategies, such as collaborative planning and rivaling, are taught, tried, and talked about and where time out for reflection and self-evaluation is a regular part of the working agenda.

Mentoring Pierre

Pierre is fourteen, popular, quick-witted, assertive, African-American and attracted to the alluring talk and prestige of gangs. In working through the issue of "belonging" in his own mind, he also has a message for adults who fail to see what small neighborhood gangs mean and how they function in the life of inner-city teenagers. His writing mentor from Carnegie Mellon is nineteen, white, an English major who is socially committed, but "illiterate" in the discourse of the inner city and hungry for an education outside the classroom. She and the other mentors take an academic course in community literacy that combines an introduction to literacy research, with training in collaborative planning and problem-solving strategies, with an immersion in the CLC's hands-on practice of community literacy.

The pedagogical question is, how can cognitive rhetoric help orchestrate a mutual discourse of discovery between writers and mentors, while at the same time helping Pierre negotiate his personal representation of the issues of gangs? Many mentors come with some experience as tutors, editors, professional writers, or Big Brothers or Sisters—roles where authority and expertise are expected to flow from them to a tutee or child. However, the relationships at the CLC are structured differently around the practice of "collaborative planning" in which a planning partner helps the writer think through tentative ideas and develop more strategic, self-conscious plans for his or her own writing. Equally important, this social, out-loud thinking lets students reflect on their own processes and come to see themselves as thinkers and problem solvers (Flower et al., *Making Thinking Visible).*

As the writer/planner in this pair, Pierre holds the authority here; his mentor is a partner and supporter. Pierre's text depends on *his* expertise—on the insight and experience that lets him speak for himself and teens in a public forum. The mentor supports Pierre as a thinker and writer, first by the serious listening that draws Pierre into developing his own jumble of thoughts about the prestige and pressure of gangs, and secondly by challenging him to respond to the real rhetorical problem before him. That means asking Pierre to frame his own *purpose*, to imagine his *audience* (of school board members, reporters, and educational activists), and to examine alternative *textual conventions* (e.g., adding telling details in a story or using direct address to readers) that could help him turn his ideas and purpose into text.

The following excerpt captures a personal and intellectual moment when planning becomes difficult. Pierre is working on the story of a fight in which leaving the scene seemed as problematic as staying. At this point, his mentor turns to asking "purpose" questions, trying to see what Pierre means when he says that "the reason people start gangs is power and control." Notice how the mentor draws Pierre into articulating his point, but at the same challenges him to imagine what he wants this to mean for the reader—a challenge Pierre is not yet ready, on this day, to answer.

Pierre: A lot of gangs form in order to retaliate or express something.

The main point though is for power and control. That is the real reason. Shouldn't I say having power and control is the reason?

Mentor: But see that's telling people they should go out and get power and control through gangs. Is that what you want to say?

Pierre: People have their own minds. . . . People can figure it out. I'm just saying what I think.

Wrapped up in the experience and his own mixed feelings about it, Pierre is not yet ready to invite the voices of readers and their interpretations into his negotiation.

Some background may be helpful here. Collaborative planning stretches writers to deal with hard problems. It started as a research-based teaching practice that became transformed in interesting ways as it moved from the university, to public schools, to the community (Flower, et al., *Making Thinking Visible*). Part of this earlier research, which focused on writers' problem-solving processes, illustrated how experienced writers were giving themselves richer, more rhetorically complicated problems to solve than less experienced writers. They

were elaborating, testing, and revising not just a text, but a *plan*—developing their purposes, forging key points, imagining readers and their response, and considering a wider array of textual conventions (Flower, et al., "Planning in Writing"). Moving from the story he wants to tell to understanding his key point and purpose in telling it is the very problem Pierre is working on. Planning strategies like these, however, are not learned as general rules; they develop as a form of "situated cognition." They are best learned when they are *used* in a context that offers explicit instruction and modeling as well as a scaffold that helps learners experiment and reflect on the process (Collins). Collaborative planning was designed to make thinking more "visible" by asking writers to talk out, think out their plans with a partner who combines a social support for thinking with a set of metacognitive prompts to make that thinking more critical, rhetorical, and strategic.

Collaborative planning honors the writer's emerging intentions. In group discussions at the big oval table everyone learns to take the role of supporter, to listen and elicit better thinking, and to take the role of planner whose ideas are requested and respected. But writers also need strategies for encouraging generative conflict, for challenging their own ideas and for imagining readers who see things differently. In our university research this strategy went by the name "rival hypothesis thinking," but the CLC soon turned it to "rivaling" (Higgins, Mathison, and Flower; Flower et al., *Learning to "Rival).* Despite the name, rivaling is not a mere adversarial strategy for advancing your position; it is instead an attempt to expand the writer's own internal monologues to dialogues that consider genuine alternatives, hypotheses, arguments, or positions someone else might bring to the idea in question. Rivaling brings more voices to the table by asking writers themselves to generate alternative interpretations, to imagine and speak for the responses of others who belong at the table. This may strike some as overly academic. Why is such a strategy, usually identified with academic, scientific and philosophic thinking, relevant here where analysis is trying to become action? Rivaling is not just an argument move or a way to prepare for what the "opposition" might raise, but a way to respond to open questions—to issues such as risk, respect and the structure of schools—that do not admit of easy or single answers. It responds with an inquiry designed to increase understanding by looking at the bigger picture and other images of reality.

As Figure 1 models, community literacy brings a more diverse group of people to the table as working partners, defining the issues as they see them. It lets, for instance, teenagers like Mark and Pierre (noted on this figure), as well as policy makers, put issues of risk and respect on the table. But it also takes a

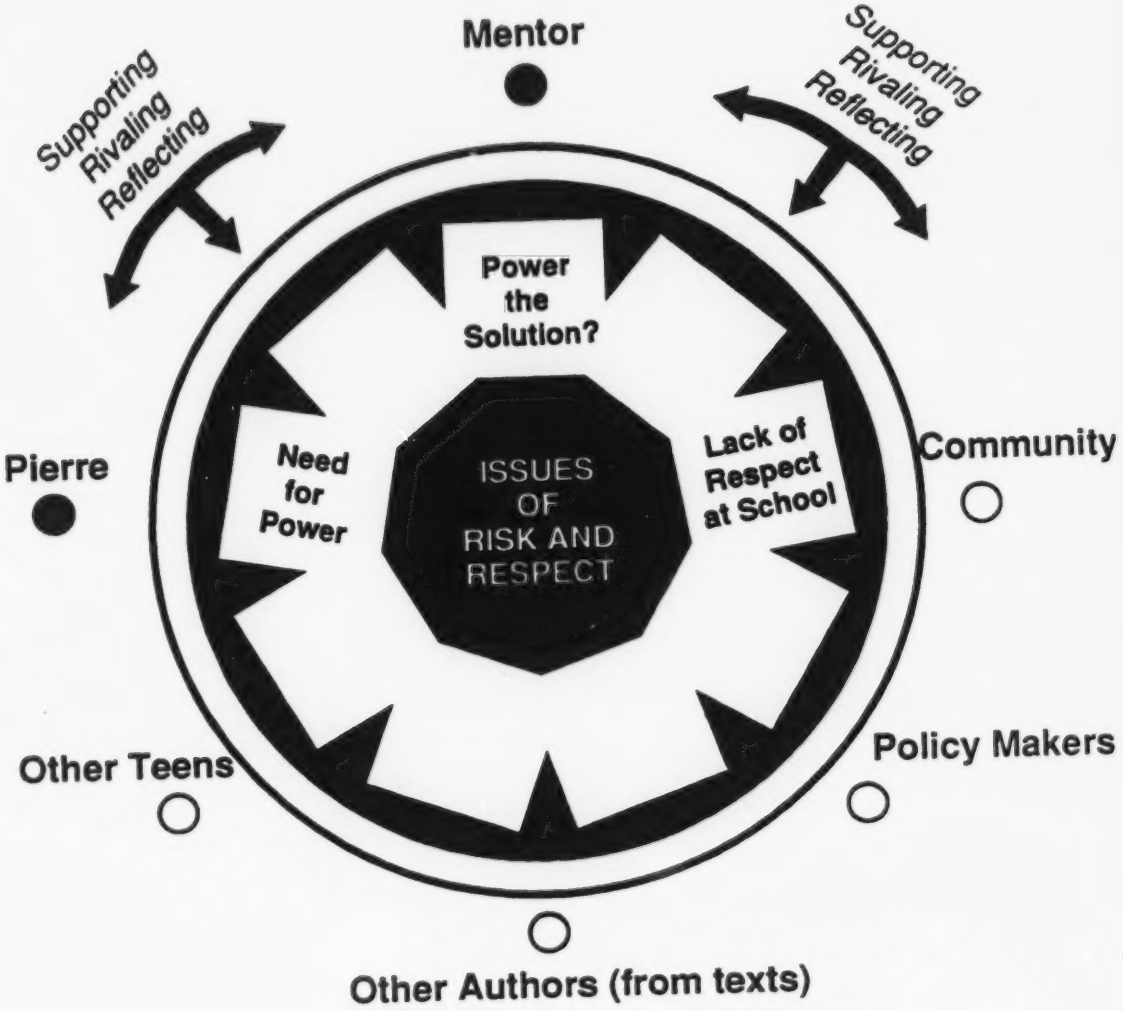

Figure 1. Bringing More Voices to the Table: A Strategic Approach to Community Literacy

new dynamic to make this process work. Strategies such as collaborative planning help support the self-expression and problem solving of people at the table, while strategies such as rivaling and reflecting help writers seek out and listen carefully to other voices. These literate practices draw the group into acts of collaborative problem-solving, while they draw individual writers into an active negotiation with other voices as they construct their own meanings.

Pierre has now finished his draft describing how a "group of friends" walking downtown turned into a "gang." On sighting a smaller group of Crips they begin shouting the Bloods' "woo-wee" call that "let's people know who they are." As the uneven encounter turns into a fight, a boy is slammed into the street, one hit with bottles and, as the fight moves into the downtown McDonald's, another is thrown through the plate glass window. For Pierre, the event and the act of writing about it are important, exciting, and confusing. He is glad to be done, proud to show the piece to a small group of us around his computer waiting to read. But how should we respond? It ends:

> People are no longer free to walk around in public. . . .A lot of gangs form in order to retaliate against other gangs or out of a need for respect and identity. The main reason, however, is for power and control. If this is the reason why people start gangs, shouldn't it also be the solution?

There is a feeling of uncertainty among the mentors. On the one hand they want to respect Pierre's authority as a writer explaining the real world teens live in and to understand the different cultural and age-related attitudes they bring to gangs. On the other, they want to speak to the human reality of Pierre's own, apparently ambivalent, relationship to these gangs. Pierre's mentor had been taking the role of a strong supporter, persisting for elaboration after Pierre thought he had written "enough" and validating Pierre's own sense of accomplishment. The atmosphere of collaboration, however, gives others the license to broach difficult questions and ask for more. A teenager, seeing the text as part of their group document says, "Yes, but, what is your point?" For her, Pierre's story is not just an expressive act, but a part of the group's "Risk and Respect" newsletter, speaking for teens and to a problem. However, it should be clear that asking Pierre what to make of the story, is also asking him to decide what it means to him. Another person in the small knot of readers begins to offer some rival interpretations people might make of this: some will read it as saying gangs are good. Teens need power, and this gives it. Is that right? Once again, Pierre says, no, he is just telling what happened. But the rival stands, not as a criticism, but as a problem he as a writer might ignore but can not deny.

At this point, Pierre may really not know all of what he does mean--much less what to do with the text. But the collaborative moment opened the door to personal discussions not only with Pierre but among other writers and mentors and to a continued negotiation with those rival readings. Pierre's final text reflects this on-going, internal dialogue and reflects a new level of strategic thinking for this teen as a writer.

> I am telling this story to let other people know how gangs can take over a neighborhood or city with police not able to be there all the time. I, myself, didn't feel comfortable being around when this incident happened. What else could I do but run, and if I ran then the people I was with would look at me as a traitor. This is a tough call to make. This situation pushes young teenagers into joining gangs for fear of being an outcast. I am not for joining gangs and I wouldn't advise it to anyone else. But why do I and others have to sit around and watch the scene being taken over? (Johnson 2)

4. As a community/university collaboration, the Community Literacy Center is committed to the goal of shared inquiry.

Over the past two decades, several American universities have recognized the potential role they might play in the development of urban communities. For example, in the early seventies, The University of Pennsylvania, which sits in the heart of West Philadelphia, began a concerted effort to collaborate with city groups, sharing expertise in housing, medicine, and law through internships and collaborative projects. Sheldon Hackney, Penn's former president, has boldly argued that universities must be socially responsible and must adopt a wider educational mission by translating and applying the great ideas they venerate (Hackney 28-29).

Such relationships, however, can be problematic. When university faculty enter communities to "consult," they often assume their expertise is immediately transferable. The results are familiar to community people. Research agendas, framed in the armchair of theory and untested in the context of real people and problems, misrepresent the factors that matter. New curricula and educational initiatives, uncritically packaged and turned over to community agencies die an early death--the testing and revision that generates new knowledge is absent or perfunctory. It is for these reasons that community literacy must take not just a serious, but a systematic interest in the problem of how university knowledge fares when it walks out into the world. What value do university-based methods have in community settings, if any? How do research and

theory-based strategies of writing and collaboration need to be adapted for successful use in these contexts? In developing a community/university partnership, we see such inquiry as a central and necessary component of the work. A university/ community partnership provides opportunities to work at the intersection of theory and practice, to further disciplinary knowledge by engaging in what Flower has called "observation-based theory building." ("Cognition, Context, and Theory Building")

While universities are sometimes limited by their own tunnel-vision, heated community discussions can also be limited due to a lack of critical evaluation. We believe that community literacy can create a discourse that can support reflection and inquiry while being rooted, at the same time, in our urban communities as grassroots laboratories of change. In the current educational debate over research, people bring strong biases for and against particular kinds of investigation. But a robust community literacy must embrace multiple kinds of inquiry—from systematic analyses that ask, "How does this literate practice operate in this context, how is it best acquired, and what are its public consequences, for whom" to personal reflections in which individuals assess their own goals and experience as writers, learners, and members of this city's intercultural community. Such inquiry must be a mutual educational process in which all parties—community and university—develop an awareness of the practices they bring and the ways they might be adapted. For us, as educators, this two-way inquiry is critical if we are to penetrate the underlying logic and art of discourse practices we do not control and if we hope to evaluate the consequences of our own assumptions and pedagogy.

Landlords and Tenants: A Case in Point

In universities, the purpose of argument is often inquiry. Multiple positions and hypotheses are assessed in order to advance knowledge on open questions (Higgins, Mathison, and Flower). In city neighborhoods, the purpose of argument is often advocacy (Kochman)—to motivate action by closing debate. Although advocacy is expedient, there are limitations in defending singular positions within complex situations that involve multiple stakeholders. By its nature, advocacy does not depend on a process of seeking out and analyzing multiple perspectives. Although advocacy can often produce short-term solutions, when it does not emerge *from* a process of inquiry, its solutions may break down or be contested again in the long run. As a result, some community groups return to the same issues, batting the same solutions back and forth month after month, year after year. Advocacy alone is limited in its ability to produce new knowledge and creative solutions that have a wide reach.

The CLC ARGUE project was designed as an inquiry into the discourse of community argument and problem-solving. Working with issues such as teen violence and safety, landlord/tenant relations, and school restructuring, ARGUE brings to the table community residents with varied expertise and explores how strategies of collaboration, writing, and academic inquiry fare in these mixed community groups. Can these groups, committed to finding solutions, taking action, and building public support on these issues, use such strategies?

One of these projects, *Landlords and Tenants*, tried to see if a group of mediators, community organizers, and landlords and tenants could adapt the practice of collaborative planning, (which had, to this point, been used to teach writing in academic settings) to the particular demands of their inner-city community and to the goals of their mixed group, which represented conflicting positions on landlord/tenant issues. The four members of the landlord/tenant group joined this experiment with a question. Could this approach help them accomplish some hard-to-achieve goals in community work: representing the viewpoints of all stakeholders at the table, developing shared, actionable goals to meet these mixed concerns, and producing a useful document that might lead to change?

One striking observation was that university strategies were actively negotiated and adapted for use in this context. The group was encouraged to begin by laying out their various positions on these issues, not for the purpose of advocacy, but analysis. But in practice, they turned this prompt into a common discourse move in community groups—narratives about the problems they had encountered. This quick positioning and impulse to tell horror stories can sometimes lead to oppositional rhetoric. People dig their heels in to defend their side of the story. On the other hand, storytelling can build solidarity when used in groups of like-minded individuals. But the use of narrative alone does not suggest a course of action, as this landlord observed:

> And I've attended a number of those meetings and there was just a group of landlords trading horror stories. . . . Cause one of the big problems with the tenant, or the landlord meetings is they have come in, for two hours they talk and nothing, nothing ends up at the other side. . . there's no decision and if there is a decision, the decision is that they all agree that they still feel the same way.

The individuals in this group, however, adapted the CLC's collaborative planning and problem analysis strategies in a way that let them move beyond narration. The need to write made a difference. The shared goal of producing a written document and the prompts to analyze causes of landlord tenant/conflicts transformed individual experiences into more generalized *scenarios*, typical cases in which the actions of individuals might be scrutinized, and through which each group member might lend a different perspective and suggestion for change.

In a purely academic context, reasoning from personal experience might not seem appropriate; however, in a community context it seemed quite necessary for a number of reasons. Narrative fulfilled an important function in helping these individuals establish ethos, testify to their beliefs, and speak forcefully for the constituents they represented. Second, the expertise of some individuals in the group was heavily encoded in personal experience, rather than formalized theories, procedures or rules. The landlord and tenant did not possess the technical or legal knowledge of the mediator, and yet had valuable wisdom in these matters born from years of first-hand experience. Telling stories allowed everyone's experience to rise to the status of knowledge, creating a leveling effect and mutual participation in the group.

For example, LuWanda, a tenant who had moved "ten times in ten years" was at first unsure of her role in the ARGUE project, listening carefully. But as the sessions progressed she began to take a more assertive stance, challenging others' ideas with examples from her personal experience, and even taking ownership over the concluding section of the document. By the end of the project, this interview with LuWanda suggested that she began to see herself as an expert with a lot to say and a right to say it.

> LuWanda: And uh, Liz (a landlord/tenant mediator in the same project), she really knows her stuff. And me, I'm an amateur (laughs). I'm just me. Uh, I have a lot to say, and I'm glad I had the opportunity to sit down with people that were not amateurs and speak on my behalf as, I . . . [pause] I wouldn't say amateur because you live and you learn. . . . So, you can't call yourself an amateur— maybe I shouldn't have even used that word but uh, I'm new at this.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, well, yeah, you're right though. The other people actually work in that area (in the profession of housing) . . . . to some extent.

LuWanda: And me, I'm just a tenant that has a lot to say. Because I know from experience of moving around to different apartments how to deal with landlords and how not to deal with landlords.

In combining and adapting community and university strategies of argument, the group produced a readable, hybrid text combining storytelling strategies with reasoned analysis and recommendation. Four scenarios (e.g., late payment of rent, condition of property, etc.) were presented, each with a set of "what if" options that landlords and tenants might consider, reflecting the wisdom of each person's experience, whether legal procedures or friendly advice about creating a climate of trust.

The hybrid process and product that was supported by community literacy in this brief example does not fit the specifications and patterns of any one community, as cultural literacy would insist. Nor, we believe, should it attempt to. Moreover, this process did more than meet the call for multiculturalism by giving a hearing to differing viewpoints. The hybrid discourse that we have observed emerges out of goal-directed interaction and negotiation of perspectives and strategies. It is a discourse that moves beyond old boundaries, one that strives towards a more productive working relationship between people of difference. Mark, LuWanda, with other community writers and our own diverse staff at the CLC have become partners into an inquiry about what this discourse might look like and the many ways in which it might be shaped.

Community Literacy is a project in process. The goal of the larger project is to build broader tables of conversation, writing, consensus, and action at the grassroots of urban communities. One can say that community literacy occurs wherever there are bridging discourses being invented and enacted by writers trying to connect with each other in order to solve a community problem. Community literacy is intercultural and multi-vocal. It is practiced as people cross boundaries, share various perspectives, and move into action. We have chosen to speak of community literacy as an emerging discourse recognizing that its forms are experimental, provisional, problematic and, in our experience, generative. In this case, community literacy has emerged from the action and reflection between residents in urban communities and their university counterparts. It has drawn its inspiration from the impulse of people to connect as well as from the different cultural traditions available within the city. And yet, the question we must continue to ask is, does it make a difference? Does it make a difference for teenagers like Mark to tell the other side of the suspension story or for a tenant like LuWanda to see her own experience as expertise, or for college mentors to realize the limits of their own literacy? In the end, we believe, in the spirit of William James, for a difference to be a difference, it has to *make* a difference (144).

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